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On the STATISTICS of CRIME in BIRMINGHAM, as COMPARED with other LARGE TOWNS. By J. THACKRAY BUNCE, Esq.

[Read before Section F, British Association, at Birmingham, September, 1865.]

TAKING all England as the standard, I have compared the crime of Birmingham with that of the whole country, and also with the crime of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield, selecting these, both as the largest towns in the kingdom, and also as having some points of resemblance to Birmingham in the facilities offered for the commission of crime. Throughout the following tables I have taken my figures from the volume of "Judicial Statistics" issued by the Home Office, and have calculated the proportion of criminals and offences to population on the census returns of 1861. For the sake of brevity the state of crime in Birmingham is given only at three triennial periods—1858, 1861, and 1864. The results of the examination are given in seven tables appended to the paper.

Table I shows the number of houses of bad character reported to the police.

Table II shows the number of the criminal classes, in their recognised divisions of known thieves, receivers, prostitutes, suspected persons and vagrants, as estimated by the police.

Table III contains the number of indictable offences committed, with the number of persons apprehended, discharged, and committed for trial.

Table IV gives the numbers of persons proceeded against summarily, with those discharged, convicted, and fined.

Tables V, VI, and VII give the nature of the indictable offences committed, the principal offences under the class of summary procedure, and the previous character (as returned by the police) of the persons dealt with under both heads.

It will probably be sufficient to read a summary of the first four of these tables:—

	1864.	1861.	1858.
Total criminal class	3,190	3,271	6,415
„ houses of bad character	906	907	844
„ number indictable offences.....	752	836	2,659
„ „ summary „	8,420	6,905	3,285
General total of indictable and summary } offences	9,172	7,741	5,944
Total persons apprehended and summoned ..	9,018	7,578	4,329
„ number discharged	4,138	3,001	2,320
„ „ convicted or committed for } trial	4,880	4,553	2,009

The discrepancy between the criminal class in 1858 and 1864 is accounted for by the adoption of a better mode of reckoning them by the police: in the former year they were merely estimated, in the last-named year the name of every person belonging to the criminal class (that is, known to be living by crime or to be a professional vagrant) was actually written down, and care was taken to see that no name appeared twice in the list. The sudden decline in the number of indictable offences between 1858 and 1861 (from 2,659 to 752) is explained by those changes in the law which gave magistrates in petty sessions authority to deal with certain classes of offences previously sent to the quarter sessions for trial. The increase last year in the number of summary offences arose from the circumstance that assaults heard on summonses had not previously been included in the number of assaults. It is satisfactory to observe that the number of indictable offences—the real test of criminality—has steadily declined: in 1861 it was 836, on a population of 296,067; in 1864 it was 752, on an estimated population of nearly 318,000. The number of summary offences, on the other hand, has increased, owing in great measure to prosecutions for offences against bye-laws passed under Acts of Parliament obtained for the local government of the borough. The houses of bad character have slightly increased, and so also has the number of the criminal population. It may be stated here that in 1864 the criminal classes were composed as follows:—females under 16, 234; females above 16, 1,017; total females, 1,251. Males under 16, 296; males above 16, 1,643; total males, 1,939 = general total, 3,190. For the 752 indictable offences committed in that year, 466 males and 132 females (total 598) were apprehended; of whom 338 males and 93 females (total 431) were committed for trial. For summary offences in the same year, 6,784 males and 1,636 females (total 8,420) were proceeded against; and of these 4,449 were convicted, 2,684 of them being merely fined. Coming to the class of indictable offences, Birmingham is found to be remarkably free from the more serious kinds of crime. In 1864 there were 2 cases of murder, and 31 of attempted murder, manslaughter, and cutting and wounding. The cases of burglary, and breaking into shops and houses, were 289, a slight increase upon 1861 (269). The number of larcenies was 225 in 1864, and 223 in 1861. Of embezzlement there were 47 cases in 1864, and 49 in 1861. Forgery numbered only 5 cases in 1864; of coining and uttering false money (generally supposed to be a specialty of Birmingham) there were but 21 cases; and of rape and criminal assaults there were 11 cases, as against 14 in 1861, and 19 in 1858. Robbery and attempted robbery with violence, forms also a small and decreasing class—the cases being 54 in 1858, 27 in 1861, and 18 in 1864. In the class of summary offences, the principal items in 1864

were, common assaults, 1,918; drunk and disorderly, 1,373; offences by publicans, 459; offences against local acts, 1,695; larceny, 1,044; offences against the Vagrant Acts, 706; and fraudulent weights and measures, 278. The return of the character of the persons proceeded against shows that the 3,190 members of the criminal class must either be very much over estimated, or very inattentive to the prosecution of their imputed profession—for of the 752 indictable offences in 1864, 206 were committed by persons either of previous good character, or whose characters were unknown; and of the 8,400 summary offences, the reputed members of the criminal class are credited with only 2,207—or barely more than one-fourth. This disparity would, of course, be greatly lessened by taking into account the large number of offences against local acts, and against the Weights and Measures Act; but I am bound to express an opinion, founded upon careful study of the “Judicial Statistics,” that the reported numbers of the criminal classes in all the large towns are mere approximations to the actual numbers, and are nearly, if not quite, valueless for the purposes of comparison.

From the above-mentioned figures, and those contained in the appended tables, I deduce the following conclusions—that, considering the population of Birmingham, and the peculiar temptations to which large classes of the population are exposed, the crime of the town is much less in amount, and of a decidedly less serious nature than could be expected; and further, that in regard to the graver indictable offences, crime is steadily diminishing. I now proceed to make a few notes of comparison between Birmingham and other large towns. The following tables show the general results of a comparison of all England, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Sheffield for the year 1864:—

Place.	Population, 1861.	Criminal Classes.	Disreputable Houses.	Indictable Offences.	Summary Offences.
England and Wales	20,066,224	101,303	—	51,058	440,913
Birmingham	296,076	3,190	906	752	8,420
Manchester	338,346	3,106	1,111	6,623	11,327
Liverpool	443,874	3,175	1,518	4,326	36,448
Leeds	207,000	1,588	313	489	6,201
Sheffield	185,000	433	161	414	5,091

Coming to the class of offences committed, the following table shows the comparative criminality of Birmingham and the four other towns above named:—

Indictable Offences.	Birmingham.	Manchester.	Liverpool.	Leeds.	Sheffield.
Murder	2	3	9	—	1
Attempts to murder, &c. ...	31	31	148	7	13
Burglary and housebreaking	289	502	305	67	34
Highway robbery	18	171	47	26	9
Larcenies.....	225	5,286	3,215	313	224

An examination of the principal items under the head of summary offences, yields the following comparative result :—

	Birmingham.	Manchester.	Liverpool.	Leeds.	Sheffield.
Assaults	1,918	2,357	3,461	1,816	981
Drunk and disorderly	1,373	3,587	14,002	1,815	1,038
Offences by publicans	459	855	933	91	224
" against local acts....	1,695	145	8,726	835	787
Malicious damage	199	246	637	164	181
Larceny	1,044	1,145	2,238	414	349
Offences against Vagrancy } Act	706	1,127	1,236	342	516
Offences against Weights } and Measures Act	278	138	118	6	298

The sea-faring and migratory population of Liverpool of course accounts for the excessive number of drunken cases in that town, and renders comparison unfair; and I am not sufficiently acquainted with the provisions of the local acts in the towns named, to institute a comparison on this head. Both these classes of offences must therefore be dismissed from consideration. But taking the indictable offences, and making due allowance for differences in population, it appears that in regard to burglary and housebreaking, Liverpool is a little, and Leeds and Sheffield are very much better than Birmingham; but that Manchester is very much worse. In regard to robbery from the person with violence, Birmingham is better than any of the towns named, excepting Sheffield. In regard to larcenies, all the towns named are much worse than Birmingham; Liverpool and Manchester being so in a most remarkable degree.

Taking the principal classes of summary offences (excluding the drunken cases in Liverpool), it appears that Birmingham is much less drunken than any of the above-named towns, that assaults in Birmingham are fewer than in any place but Sheffield, that in regard to larcenies it is superior to Liverpool, but slightly inferior to Manchester, and much below Leeds and Sheffield, and that in offences against the Vagrant Acts it is superior to all but Leeds.

I shall trouble the Section with only one more table, showing the number of the criminal classes, the indictable offences, the summary offences, and of both combined, in proportion to population :—

	England, 1 in	Birmingham, 1 in	Manchester, 1 in	Liverpool, 1 in	Leeds, 1 in	Sheffield, 1 in
<i>Indictable Offences—</i> Crimes reported.....	394·96	393·72	51·08	102·6	423·3	446·86
<i>Summary Offences—</i> Persons proceeded against.....	45·5	35·16	29·87	12·17	33·38	36·33
<i>Indictable Offences and</i> <i>Summary Offences—</i> Taken together	40·8	32·28	18·85	10·88	30·94	33·6
<i>Criminal Classes—</i> Reputed number	198·08	92·81	108·83	108·3	130·35	427·25

From this table it appears that in regard to the more serious classes of crime included under the head of indictable offences, Birmingham is but very slightly under the average of all England, the proportion of crimes committed being in round figures 1 in 395 to all England, and 1 in 394 in Birmingham. Leeds and Sheffield are above the average of the kingdom; Liverpool and Manchester enormously below it. The respective morality in regard to indictable offences of the five towns, therefore, stands as follows:—Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester. In regard to offences over which the magistrates exercise summary jurisdiction, the places undergo some modification: the five towns standing as follow in the order of criminality—Sheffield, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool. Taking both classes of offences together—the same order is maintained, Sheffield still keeping the lead; a fact which will not a little surprise those who have been accustomed to consider that town as one of the worst in the kingdom—an evil reputation which it has unjustly shared with Birmingham. One more table I put in for the information of the Section, rather than as intending to offer any remarks upon it, though some of the results are suggestive, and even startling enough to give rise to comment and inquiry:—

Indictable Offences.—Crimes Reported, Apprehensions, and Number of Persons Discharged and Committed.

	Offences.	Apprehended.	Discharged.	Convicted.	Police to Population.
					1 in
Leeds	489	414	77	337	787
Sheffield	351	332	120	212	801
Birmingham	752	598	157	431	785
Liverpool	4,326	2,125	1,213	912	431
Manchester	6,623	1,407	775	632	504
All England	51,058	28,734	8,700	20,004	906

From this table it appears that the percentage of *apprehensions to reported offences* is as follows:—all England, $56\frac{1}{2}$; Birmingham, 79; Manchester, 21; Liverpool, 49; Leeds, $84\frac{3}{4}$; Sheffield, $94\frac{1}{2}$.

The *percentage of committals* to apprehensions is as follows:—all England, $69\frac{1}{2}$; Birmingham, 72; Manchester, 45; Liverpool, 42; Leeds, 81; Sheffield, $63\frac{3}{4}$.

NOTE.—Since this paper was read, the police returns for Birmingham, for the year ending 29th September, 1865, have been made up. They show a slight decrease in the number of the criminal classes, 3,068, as against 3,190 in the previous year; and there is also a decrease in the number of houses of bad character, 866 in 1865, as against 906 in 1864. But, strangely enough, there is a decided increase in the number of offences, both as regards indictable and summary offences. The statement for the two years is as follows:—

	Indictable Offences.	Summary Prosecutions.
1864.....	752	8,420
'65	1,258	9,188

The increase in the number of *indictable offences* reported is 506, due chiefly to an increased number of larcenies, of burglaries, or attempted burglaries. In 1864, the larcenies reported were 224; in 1865, they were 466; an increase of 232, or more than one-half. Of burglaries and attempted burglaries there were reported 289 in 1864, and 417 in 1865, an increase of 126, or nearly one-fourth. There was also an increase of 46 cases of coining and uttering. It may be the case that there has been a general increase of crime throughout the kingdom; but until the next volume of "Judicial Statistics" is published, there exists no means of determining this point. I have been unable to ascertain that there are any special causes which would justify me in considering the increase in Birmingham as peculiar to that town. Still, the fact is so remarkable that I have thought it only proper to make it the subject of a note. The increase in the number of *persons summarily proceeded against*, 768, is accounted for under three heads; assaults, which showed an increase of 227 (2,145 as against 1,918); drunk and disorderly, increase 333 (1,706 as against 1,373); and malicious damage, increase 32 (231 as against 199). There was also a slight increase in the number of prosecutions of beer-house keepers. Another point worthy of note is that the proportions of apprehensions to offences reported fell off greatly in 1865, as compared with

the previous year. In 1864, the number of persons apprehended was 79½ per cent. on the indictable offences reported; and the number committed was 72 per cent. on the apprehensions. In 1865, the apprehensions were only 64 per cent. on the number of offences reported; and the committals 54 per cent. on the apprehensions. These results would seem to lead to the conclusion that while crime has increased, the police have proved themselves less *efficient* than usual (as shown by the smaller percentage of apprehensions upon offences), and less *judicious*, as shown by the still greater reduction in the percentage of committals upon apprehensions.

J. T. B.

APPENDIX.

The following tables give the state of crime in Birmingham :—

TABLE I.—*Houses of Bad Character.*

	Receivers.	Victuallers.	Beer Houses.	Coffee Shops.	Others.	Brothels.	Tramps.	Total.
1864 ...	128	193	129	9	18	183	246	906
'61....	212	128	82	17	30	204	234	907
'58....	201	84	32	20	43	224	240	844

TABLE II.—*Numbers of the Criminal Class in Birmingham.*

Year.	Known Thieves.		Receivers.	Prostitutes.	Suspects.		Daily Average Vagrants.	
	Males.	Females.			Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.
1864 ...	656	323	128	402	469	283	695	234
	979				752		929	

Year.	Totals under 16.		Totals above 16.		Grand Total.
	Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.	
1864.....	296	234	1,643	1,017	3,190
	929		530		

TABLE III.—*Indictable Offences.*

Year.	Crimes Committed.	Persons Apprehended.		Discharged.		Committed for Trial.		Total.
		Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.	Males.	Females.	
1864.....	752	466	132	128	39	338	93	431
'61.....	836	503	170	158	64	327	100	427
'53.....	2,659	753	291	439	208	314	83	397

TABLE IV.—*Summary Offences.*

Year.	Persons Proceeded Against.			Discharged.	Convicted.	Fined.
	Males.	Females.	Total.			
1864.....	6,784	1,636	8,420	3,971	4,449	2,684
'61.....	5,667	1,238	6,905	2,779	4,126	2,659
'58.....	2,590	695	3,285	1,673	1,612	758

TABLE V.—*Indictable Offences.*

Nature of Crime.	1864.	1861.	1858.
1. Murder.....	2	2	—
2. Attempts—wounding, manslaughter	31	21	25
3. Rape and assault with intent, unnatural } offence, &c.	11	14	19
4. Bigamy	3	6	—
5. Assaults, &c., on police officers, &c.	2	15	11
6. Burglary, sacrilege, breaking into shops, and attempts at ditto	289	269	491
7. Highway robbery and attempts, &c.....	18	27	54
8. Cattle, horse, and sheep stealing	3	13	14
9. Larceny of all classes, and attempts to steal	224	223	1,728
10. Embezzlement.....	47	49	37
11. Post Office robberies	—	—	—
12. Receiving stolen goods	34	31	41
13. False pretences, &c.	31	66	101
14. Arson, &c.	1	1	2
15. Forgery	5	13	13
16. Coining and uttering	21	49	96
17. Perjury	4	9	—
18. Disorderly houses, &c.	1	1	—
19. Suicide—attempts	21	12	—
20. Other felonies and misdemeanors	3	4	7

TABLE VI.—*Nature of Summary Offences.*

	1864.	1861.	1858.
Assaults	1,918	702*	615
Drunk and disorderly	1,373	1,186	872
Offences by victuallers and beerhouse keepers	459	719	74
Against local acts	1,695	1,395	111
Malicious damages, &c.	199	116	116
Larceny, &c.	1,044	911	580
Vagrant Act	706	728	408
Weights and Measures Act	278	286	—

* A number on summonses not included.

TABLE VII.—*Class of Persons proceeded against.*

	1864.	1861.	1858.
<i>Indictable Offences—</i>			
Previous good character	101	90	104
Character not known	105	211	507
Known thieves	284	124	177
Prostitutes	4	33	113
Vagrants	—	43	4
Suspicious characters	94	159	116
Habitual drunkards	10	13	20
<i>Summary Offences—</i>			
*Previous good character	412	2,428	458
*Character unknown	5,857	2,632	1,689
Known thieves	554	323	118
Prostitutes	111	267	167
Vagrants	553	498	281
Suspicious characters	447	564	452
Habitual drunkards	542	194	120

* Offences against local acts, assaults on summons, offences against Weights and Measures Act, &c.